

20

ON THE
E T E R N I T Y
OF THE
S U P R E M E B E I N G .

A
P O E T I C A L E S S A Y .

By CHRISTOPHER SMART, M.A.
Fellow of Pembroke-Hall in the University of Cambridge.

*Conamur tenues grandia —
Nec Dis, nec viribus æquis —*

C A M B R I D G E ,

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A Clause of Mr. Seaton's Will,

Dated Oct. 8. 1738.

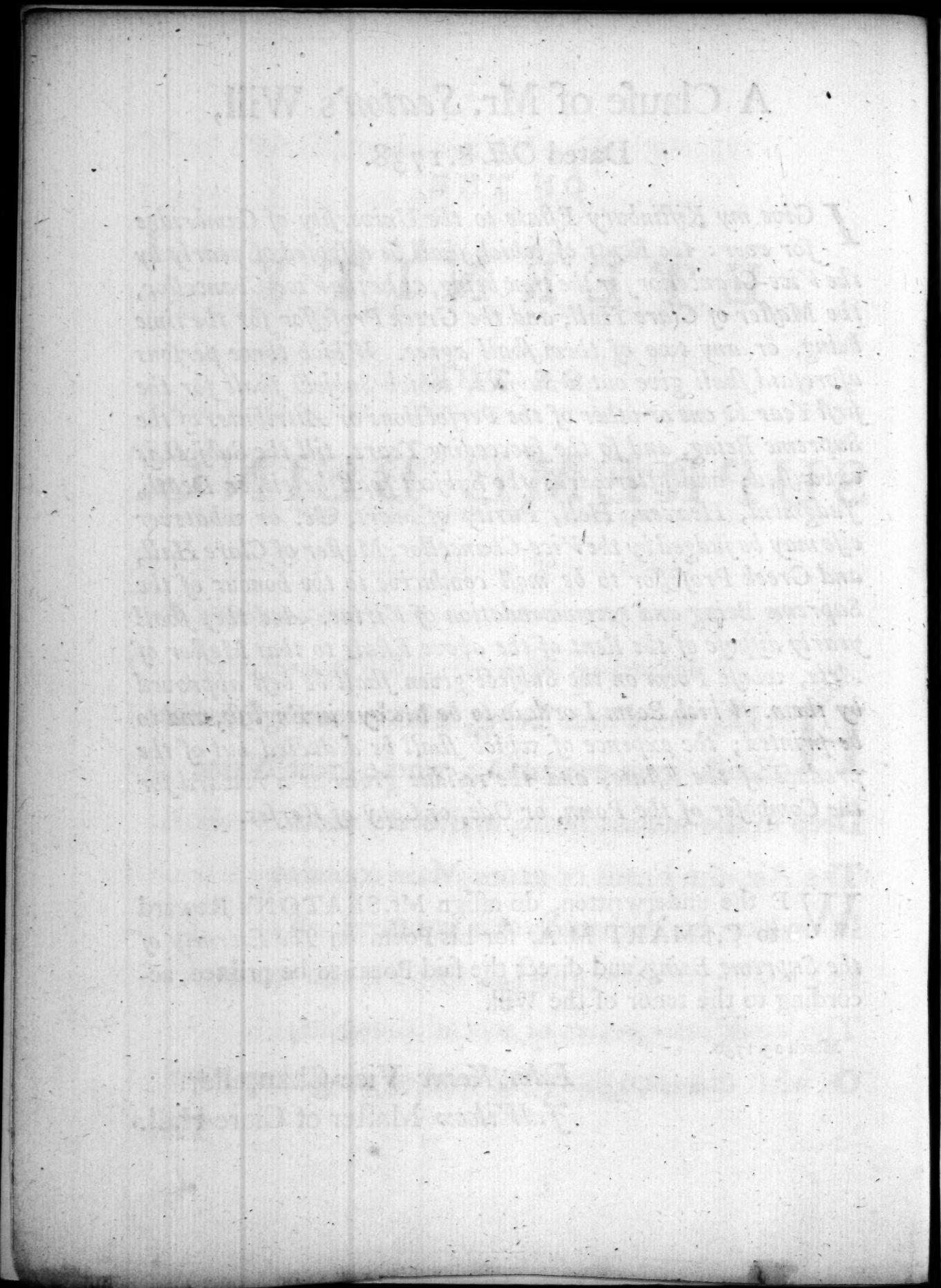
I Give my Kislinbury Estate to the University of Cambridge for ever: the Rents of which shall be disposed of yearly by the Vice-Chancellor for the time being, as he the Vice-Chancellor, the Master of Clare Hall, and the Greek Professor for the time being, or any two of them shall agree. Which three persons aforesaid shall give out a Subject, which Subject shall for the first Year be one or other of the Perfections or Attributes of the Supreme Being, and so the succeeding Years, till the Subject is exhausted; and afterwards the Subject shall be either Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell, Purity of heart, &c. or whatever else may be judged by the Vice-Chancellor, Master of Clare Hall, and Greek Professor to be most conducive to the honour of the Supreme Being and recommendation of Virtue. And they shall yearly dispose of the Rent of the above Estate to that Master of Arts, whose Poem on the Subject given shall be best approved by them. Which Poem I ordain to be always in English, and to be printed; the expence of which shall be deducted out of the product of the Estate, and the residue given as a reward for the Composer of the Poem, or Ode, or Copy of Verses.

WE the underwritten, do assign Mr. SEATON's Reward to C. SMART M. A. for his Poem on *The Eternity of the Supreme Being*, and direct the said Poem to be printed, according to the tenor of the Will.

March 25. 1750.

Edm: Keene Vice-Chancellor.

J. Wilcox Master of Clare Hall.



(8)

ON THE
ETERNITY
OF THE
SUPREME BEING.

HAIL, wond'rous Being, who in pow'r supreme
Exists from everlasting, whose great Name
Deep in the human heart, and every atom
The Air, the Earth or azure Main contains
In undecypher'd characters is wrote —
INCOMPREHENSIBLE! — O what can words
The weak interpreters of mortal thoughts,
Or what can thoughts (tho' wild of wing they rove

Thro'

Thro' the vast concave of th' ætherial round)
 If to the Heav'n of Heavens they'd win their way
 Advent'rous, like the birds of night they're lost,
 And delug'd in the flood of dazzling day.—

May then the youthful, uninspired Bard
 Presume to hymn th' Eternal; may he soar
 Where Seraph, and where Cherubin on high
 Resound th' unceasing plaudits, and with them
 In the grand Chorus mix his feeble voice?

He may — if Thou, who from the witless babe
 Ordainest honor, glory, strength and praise,
 Uplift th' unpinion'd Muse, and deign'st to assist,
 GREAT POET OF THE UNIVERSE, his song.

Before this earthly Planet wound her course
 Round Light's perennial fountain, before Light
 Herself 'gan shine, and at th' inspiring word
 Shot to existence in a blaze of day,
 Before "the Morning-Stars together fang"
 And hail'd Thee Architect of countless worlds

Thou

Thou art — all-glorious, all-beneficent,
All Wisdom and Omnipotence thou art.

But is the æra of Creation fix'd
At when these Worlds began? Cou'd ought retard
Goodness, that knows no bounds, from blessing ever,
Or keep th' immense Artificer in sloth?
Avaunt the dust-directed crawling thought,
That Puissance immeasurably vast,
And Bounty inconceivable cou'd rest
Content, exhausted with one week of action —
No — in th' exertion of thy righteous pow'r,
Ten thousand times more active than the Sun,
Thou reign'd, and with a mighty hand compos'd
Systems innumerable, matchless all,
All stamp'd with thine uncounterfeited seal.

But yet (if still to more stupendous heights
The Muse unblam'd her aching sense may strain)
Perhaps wrapt up in contemplation deep,
The best of Beings on the noblest theme

Might

Might ruminate at leisure, Scope immense
 Th' eternal Pow'r and Godhead to explore,
 And with itself th' omniscient mind replete.
 This were enough to fill the boundless All,
 This were a Sabbath worthy the Supreme!
 Perhaps enthron'd amidst a choicer few,
 Of Spirits inferior, he might greatly plan
 The two prime Pillars of the Universe,
 Creation and Redemption — and a while
 Pause — with the grand presentiments of glory.

Perhaps — but all's conjecture here below,
 All ignorance, and self-plum'd vanity —
 O Thou, whose ways to wonder at's distrust,
 Whom to describe's presumption (all we can, —
 And all we may —) be glorified, be prais'd.

A Day shall come, when all this Earth shall perish,
 Nor leave behind ev'n Chaos; it shall come
 When all the armies of the elements
 Shall war against themselves, and mutual rage

To

To make Perdition triumph ; it shall come,
 When the capacious atmosphere above
 Shall in sulphureous thunders groan, and die,
 And vanish into void ; the earth beneath
 Shall sever to the center, and devour
 Th' enormous blaze of the destructive flames.
 Ye rocks, that mock the raving of the floods,
 And proudly frown upon th' impatient deep,
 Where is your grandeur now ? Ye foaming waves,
 That all along th' immense Atlantic roar,
 In vain ye swell ; will a few drops suffice
 To quench the inextinguishable fire ?
 Ye mountains, on whose cloud-crown'd tops the cedars
 Are lessen'd into shrubs, magnific piles,
 That prop the painted chambers of the heav'ns
 And fix the earth continual ; Athos, where ;
 Where, Tenerif 's thy stateliness to-day ?
 What, Ætna, are thy flames to these ? — No more
 Than the poor glow-worm to the golden Sun.

Nor shall the verdant vallies then remain
 Safe in their meek submission; they the debt
 Of nature and of justice too must pay.

Yet I must weep for you, ye rival fair,
 Arno and Andalusia; but for thee
 More largely and with filial tears must weep,
 O Albion, O my Country; Thou must join,
 In vain disfever'd from the rest, must join
 The terrors of th' inevitable ruin.

Nor thou, illustrious monarch of the day;
 Nor thou, fair queen of night; nor you, ye stars,
 Tho' million leagues and million still remote,
 Shall yet survive that day; Ye must submit
 Sharers, not bright spectators of the scene.

But tho' the Earth shall to the center perish,
 Nor leave behind ev'n Chaos; tho' the air
 With all the elements must pass away,
 Vain as an ideot's dream; tho' the huge rocks,
 That brandish the tall cedars on their tops,

With

With humbler vales must to perdition yield;
 Tho' the gilt Sun, and silver-tressed Moon
 With all her bright retinue, must be lost ;
 Yet Thou, Great Father of the world, surviv'st
 Eternal, as thou wert : Yet still survives
 The soul of man immortal, perfect now,
 And candidate for unexpiring joys.

He comes ! He comes ! the awful trump I hear ;
 The flaming sword's intolerable blaze
 I see ; He comes ! th' Archangel from above.
 " Arise, ye tenants of the silent grave,
 " Awake incorruptible and arise :
 " From east to west, from the antarctic pole
 " To regions hyperborean, all ye sons,
 " Ye sons of Adam, and ye heirs of Heav'n —
 " Arise, ye tenants of the silent grave,
 " Awake incorruptible and arise.

'Tis then, nor sooner, that the restless mind
 Shall find itself at home; and like the ark

Fix'd on the mountain-top, shall look aloft
 O'er the vague passage of precarious life ;
 And, winds and waves and rocks and tempests past,
 Enjoy the everlasting calm of Heav'n :
 'Tis then, nor sooner, that the deathless soul
 Shall justly know its nature and its rise :
 'Tis then the human tongue new-tun'd shall give
 Praises more worthy the eternal ear.
 Yet what we can, we ought ; — and therefore, Thou,
 Purge thou my heart, Omnipotent and Good !
 Purge thou my heart with hyssop, lest like Cain
 I offer fruitless sacrifice, and with gifts
 Offend and not propitiate the Ador'd.
 Tho' gratitude were bless'd with all the pow'r's
 Her bursting heart cou'd long for, tho' the swift,
 The firey-wing'd imagination soar'd
 Beyond ambition's wish — yet all were vain
 To speak Him as he is, who is INEFFABLE.
 Yet still let reason thro' the eye of faith

View Him with fearful love ; let truth pronounce,
And adoration on her bended knee
With Heav'n-directed hands confess His reign.
And let th' Angelic, Archangelic band
With all the Hosts of Heav'n, Cherubic forms,
And forms Seraphic, with their silver trumps
And golden lyres attend : — “ For Thou art holy,
“ For thou art One, th' Eternal, who alone
“ Exerts all goodness, and transcends all praise.”

F I N I S.

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